DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 235 432 CG 016 966

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TITLE Ordinal Position in Role Play Practice.
PUB DATE 21 May 83
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Counseling Techniques; *Counselor Training; Empathy; Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Performance Factors; *Role Playing; Simulation; *Skill Development; Socialization; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Order Analysis

ABSTRACT

Although the effectiveness of role play and its vicarious learning experiences for counselor training is well documented, little research has focused on the impact of the order of playing the roles on skill development. To investigate the effect of ordinal position, 36 beginning counseling students, 24 female and 12 male, with a median age of 30, participated in three 15 minute role playing sessions. The students were assigned to one of 12 counseling triads and then assigned to intratriad levels of ordinal position, counselor first, second, or third. Each subject also rotated through the client and observer roles. Prior to the sessions, all subjects were trained in the counseling skill, reflection of feeling. Following the exercises, written and audio transcripts of the counselors' responses were rated for frequency and degree of fidelity to the clients' feelings. An analysis of the results showed that neither ordinal position nor client or observer role affected the students' abilities to produce reflection of feeling responses. However, the accuracy of reflection of feeling responses (fidelity) showed steady improvement from counselor one to counselor three. In light of these findings, counselor trainers need to research further the most effective conditions for implementing role play in counselor training. (BL)

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ED235432

Ordinal Position in Role Play Practice

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Submitted May 21, 1983

CG 016966

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Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank Elizabeth Skarie, Eric Nichols, and Thomas Embrey for thier extensive help in audiotape rating.

Abstract

To investigate the effects of ordinal position when involved in role play practice, 36 novice trainees were assigned to a counseling triad and then to the levels of ordinal position - Counselor first, second, or third. Each subject also served as a client and as an observer within the triad. No difference among the three ordinal positions were found in the trainees' abilities to produce reflection of feeling responses. Similarly there were no differences between those subjects who functioned as a client and those who functioned as an observer prior to being the role play counselor. However, there was a significant positive linear trend for ordinal position, i.e., the accuracy of the subjects' reflection of feeling responses steadily improved from counselor one to counselor three. These results are discussed from a social learning theory perspective.

Role playing as a simulated counseling experience has been used as a standard method for training counselors (Ford, 1979) and has generally been supported empirically (Delaney, 1969; Mann & Mann, 1966; Bailey, Deardorff & Nye, 1977). Investigations of the effects of role play in combination with other treatments have demonstrated that skill development is enhanced when role play practice is yoked with modeling and/or instructions (Stone, 1975; Teevan & Gabel, 1978; O'Toole, 1979; Froehle, Robinson & Kurpius, 1983).

This effectiveness of role play practice in enhancing skill development can be attributed to several learning principles. Taking a social learning theory perspective (Bandura, 1977b), role playing could be viewed as a unique form of influencing the self-efficacy of the individuals involved in the role play. Two major sources of efficacy expectations, vicarious experience and performance accomplishments (Bandura, 1977a), are potentially involved in role playing.

In a role play situation, roles are altered in order that a number of learning situations can be presented to trainees (Boyd, 1978). Typically the trainee will alternate among the roles of observer, client, and counselor. In the role of the observer, and to some extent in the role of client, the trainee is allowed to engage in vicarious learning through observing a live model. In the role of counselor, the trainee has the opportunity to perform the activity (performance exposure) and to serve as a participant model for the other members of the role play triad. According to Bandura (1977), "participant modeling provides additional opportunities for translating behavioral conceptions to appropriate actions and for making corrective refinements toward the perfection of skills" (p, 196).

Considering the apparent uniqueness of the learning afforded by each role, particularly in terms of explaining behavior change, it is surprising that no research has examined what impact the order of playing these roles has on trainee skill performance. The purpose of this research was to investigate the effects of role playing on counselor trainees. Specifically three questions were addressed:

1. What are the differences in skill performance of trainees who are counselors first, second, or third?
2. What impact does being a client or an observer first have on later skill performance as a counselor?
3. To what extent will the prior performance of trainees serving as counselors influence the skill performance of trainees serving as counselors later?

Method

Subjects and Design

Thirty-six beginning master's degree students in counseling participated in this study as part of a required class module. The 24 females and 12 males ranged in age from 21 to 48 with a median age of 30. Although a few of the subjects had worked or were still working in the helping fields, none had had any formal training in counseling skills. Prior to this class module, the microcounseling skills of questioning and paraphrasing had been taught.

Subjects were randomly assigned to 12 counseling triads. Then, using the triad as a blocking variable, subjects were randomly assigned to the order of role play counselor. The three levels of order were counselor one, counselor two, and counselor three. The resulting design was a randomized blocking design (RB3) as described by Kirk (1982).

Treatment Conditions

The three main treatment conditions were functioning as counselor first, second, and third within the triad. Within the counselor two and counselor three conditions were two subconditions, serving as a client prior to being the counselor or (2) serving as the observer prior to being the counselor. Each subject served as a client and an observer as well as being a counselor within the triad.

Procedures

Prior to involvement in the role play triads, each subject received class instruction on the counseling skill, reflection of feelings. Following the procedure developed by Robinson (1978), the class interacted with a self-instructional videotape on reflection of feelings (Robinson, Kurpius, & Froehle, 1979). The videotape consisted of a brief overview of the skill, a 15 minute segment presenting a male counselor modeling reflection of feeling responses to a client, and then a practice-feedback segment. This segment presented (1) a client, (2) a pause for students to practice responding, (3) cues for judging the accuracy of their response, and (4) another pause for discussion. This series was repeated for eight client vignettes with the class discussing possible reflection of feeling responses. In order to determine whether the subjects had learned to produce reflection of feeling responses, each subject individually responded in writing to ten stimulus client vignettes appearing on the videotape. Each client statement, which was 15 seconds in length, was played, and then the subjects were given one minute to write a reflection of feeling response. This was repeated for the 10 client vignettes. At the completion of this assessment, the subjects were assigned to their role play triads and asked to meet again in two days.

The class reconvened two days later in a counselor training center where each triad met in an individual counseling room. The students were given their role play order on a small notecard and told to proceed through the three counseling sessions without discussing the events of an individual session until all sessions were completed. Each subject was given an audiotape and asked to record his/her session as a counselor.

Specific instructions were given for the three roles. As the client they were to discuss a personal concern. The counselor's responsibility was to focus on the implied or expressed emotions of the client. Serving as a time keeper, the observer was to begin and end the session and to remain quiet during the role play counseling. Each session was 15 minutes long, and the total role play experience for each triad was 45 minutes long. Another 45 minutes was allowed for the triad to process the three role play sessions.

At the end of the lab experience, each subject was asked to do a verbatim typescript of his/her own counseling session. The audiotapes and typescripts were collected during the next class period. At this time the subjects were debriefed as to the goals of the study.

Dependent Variable

The counselor response chosen to assess the order of counseling effect was reflection of feelings. This skill focuses on the "essential feelings, stated or strongly implied, of the helper" (Brammer, 1973, p. 90). Understanding the affective component along with the cognitive components of the client's statements and communicating this understanding back to the client is viewed as a basic skill necessary for all counselors (Benjamin, 1981; Ivey, 1971; Hackney & Cormier, 1979; Egan, 1982).

Rating of Subject Responses

Two sets of responses were rated. The subjects' responses to the ten client vignettes were rated as a producedural check to determine whether all subjects in the three treatment conditions were equally able to produce reflection of feeling responses prior to entering the role play experience. The second set of responses rated were the subjects' responses as counselors in the role play counseling.

Client Vignettes. Two doctoral students rated the subjects' written responses to the 10 client vignettes. Initially the two doctoral students listened to the stimulus client vignette videotape and identified the prevalent emotions in each of the 10 client statements. Using these prevalent emotions as criteria for judging the subject responses, the raters then evaluated each subject response on two dimensions which were defined and rated with these guidelines:

1. Frequency - whether or not the skill could be classified as a reflection of feeling response. (Rated 0 or 1. Possible score range was 0 - 10).
2. Feeling Fidelity - the degree to which the trainee's response reflected the prevalent feelings conveyed in each client statement. (Rated 1 to 5. Possible score range was 0 - 50).

The interrater reliability for frequency was 100 percent, and the Ebel (1951) reliability coefficient for feeling fidelity was .75. Both raters assessed all subjects' responses, and an average of their ratings was used in the data analysis; i.e., if one rater awarded a three to a response and the other rater awarded a four, the response received a 3.5. The ratings across the 10 responses were then summed to form each of the dependent measures for the data analyses.

Role Play Counseling. Three doctoral students were trained to evaluate the role play counselor responses. This rating occurred in three phases. In phase one, the three raters initially evaluated each role play client statement as to whether it could stimulate a reflection of feeling counselor response. Those determined to be such statements were designated with checkmarks on the typescripts. Agreement among the three raters for this client evaluation was .95. For phase two, the counselor responses to the designated client statements were evaluated for feeling frequency - whether the counselor response was or was not a reflection of feeling response, rated one and zero respectively. Agreement for this rating was .82 among the three raters. In the third phase of rating each of the counselor reflection of feeling responses was rated for feeling fidelity on a scale of one to five. The more accurately the response reflected the feelings of the client, the higher the rating. The reliability for feeling fidelity was .72 (Ebel, 1951).

All three raters evaluated all of the client statements in phase one. However, for phases two and three, each doctoral student judged two thirds of the subjects' audiotapes. To control for rater error, differences in raters' evaluations of individual responses were handled by taking an average of the two ratings. Then these averaged ratings were summed across of responses to form a frequency and a feeling fidelity score for each subject.

To control for differences in opportunity to produce reflection of feeling responses (i.e., difference in client stimulus statements), each frequency score was divided by the corresponding number of client statements evaluated as appropriate stimuli. This new score then became the roleplay frequency (RPF) score employed in the data analysis. Similarly,

the feeling fidelity score was divided by the new frequency score to get an average feeling fidelity (AFF) score with a range of zero to five for each subject.

Results

Prior to analyzing the questions of interest, the subjects' frequency and feeling fidelity scores in response to the ten client vignettes were compared to determine whether there were any pretreatment differences among the assigned ordinal positions within the triad. A MANOVA procedure yielded F (4, 42)=2.11, $p < .09$. The ANOVA on the frequency score was not significant ($p < .60$); however, the ANOVA for feeling fidelity was significant, F (2, 35) = 4.55, $p < .02$. A Tukey's multiple comparison showed that the mean for subjects in ordinal position three (X=30.83) was significantly larger than the mean for subjects in ordinal position one (X=26.75), but neither of these differed from subjects in ordinal position two (X=27.29). Because of this pretreatment skill difference, the feeling fidelity scores for client vignettes were covariated out of the role play counseling scores used to answer the research questions.

To answer the first question pertaining to differences in skill performance among the three role play positions, the data were analyzed using a MANCOVA which blocked on triad. The Wilks' criterion, F (4,40) = 2.04, $p < .10$, was not statistically significant. However, to avoid a possible Type II error, it was decided to calculate the ANCOVAs. The differences in adjusted role play frequency scores was not significant ($p < .70$). However, the differences between ordinal positions on the adjusted average feeling fidelity (AFF) scores approached significance, F (2,21) = 3.17, $p < .06$. Although we cannot say the ordinal positions were significantly different, it would be erroneous to claim they are the same in terms of

feeling fidelity. Examination of the means in Table one shows a steady increase in mean skill performance on feeling fidelity as the role play order changes from order one to order three.

The second question asked whether being a client or an observer prior to serving as a counselor would differentially influence later counselor performance. Two analyses were used to answer this question. First, the counselors in ordinal position two who were clients first were compared to those who were observers first. The Hotellings T^2 was nonsignificant at the .55 level. For the second analysis the counselors in ordinal position three who were clients or observers just prior to being counselor were added to the clients or observers groups in the previous analysis. Once again the Hotellings T^2 was nonsignificant, $p < .59$.

To answer the third research question, a trend analysis on the ordinal positions was calculated. By employing only those trend components that are found to be significant, it is possible to represent the relationship that exists between the dependent variables and the variable of ordinal position. Neither the linear ($p < .67$) nor the guadratic ($p < .39$) trends were significant for the frequency scores. However, the linear trend for feeling fidelity scores was significant, $F(1,22)=5.31$, $p < .03$. There is a steady significant positive linear trend in the data as the ordinal position changes from first, to second, to third. The adjusted means for these positins are 2.27, 2.60, and 2.79 respectively.

Discussion

The major finding of this study is that the performance of prior members in a role play triad, where the purpose is to practice counseling skills, will affect the performance of the members of the triad whose turn to counsel comes later. Although the number of produced reflection of

feeling responses is not linearly related to prior peer performance, the quality of the responses in terms of how accurately the feelings of the clients are reflected is significantly related. If the quality of performance of counselor one and counselor two is known, then we can accurately predict the quality of the performance of counselor three. The data indicate that the quality of trainee performance steadily increases as the number of observed or participated in role play practice sessions increases.

Although the scores for the three ordinal positions were not statistically different, the analysis of covariance on the feeling fidelity scores approached significance. An examination of the adjusted means for feeling fidelity shows a steady improvement in quality from counselor one to counselor two to counselor three. Perhaps if the cell size had been larger or the treatment period longer (Kirk, 1982), more conclusive results could have been obtained.

The present findings do lend support to Bandura's concepts of vicarious learning and performance exposure (1977a). It would appear that while counselor three was functioning as a client and as an observer in the triad, he/she was also vicariously learning how to reflect feelings accurately. The same is also true for counselor two. Interestingly, being the observer as compared to the client, who supposedly would be more involved in the interaction, did not have any impact on the later performance as the counselor. It can be concluded that performance exposure, that is, observing participant model(s), has a significant influence on one's own quality of skill performance.

Some limitations of this study are evident. The cell size, n=12, is relatively small, and, although the duration of treatment was brief, it is

typical of role play practice sessions used in classroom experiences, it was relatively brief. The ratio of men to women was not equivalent; therefore, the influences of gender could not be analyzed. Even more importantly, prior experience of individuals and the status accorded to various classmates could have influenced the "live modeling" effect of these individuals. This was not controlled.

In spite of these limitations, these initial findings do have impact for counselor educators. Perhaps as educators, we should expose our students to each others' counseling behaviors in a much more systematic manner. That is, perhaps the strongest students should be the first to role play counselors in triadic behavioral rehearsal. Or perhaps, the person who is first in the role of counselor should be given another opportunity to practice after counselor three finishes.

This issue and other questions which evolve from this research need to be addressed by counselor education researchers. Although, role play is a commonly used and well received training paradigm, counselor educators are just beginning to know something about the conditions under which it is most effective.

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Table 1. All Means and Standard Deviations for Dependent measures and for Role Play Client Stimulus

	Ordinal Position One (n=12)		Ordinal Position Two (n=12)		Ordinal Position Three (n=12)	
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
Client Vignette Frequency	9.58	.67	9.75	.62	9.83	.39
Client Vignette Feeling Fidelity	26.75	4.62	27.29	3.98	30.83	3.04
Role Play Frequency	.25	.26	.20	.09	.29	.19
Average Feeling Fidelity	2.31	.50	2.62	.51	2.73	.59
Adjusted Role Play Frequency	.29	.06	.23	.06	.22	.06
Adjusted Average Feeling Fidelity	2.27	.14	2.60	.13	2.79	.15
Role Play Client Stimulus	20.33	6.44	24.00	7.40	17.50	5.99